

OPEN AND SHUT?

Monday, May 30, 2016

The OA Interviews: Michaël Bon, Founder of the Self-Journal of Science

"The OA movement has been fighting the wrong battle (all be it for a just cause), and for so long as it carries on doing so it will continue diverting and exhausting scientists and institutions in a fool's game in which they have little power."



Tweets by @RickyPo

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Fifteen months ago 35-year old French scientist Michaël Bon launched a new open-access publishing service called the **Self-Journal of Science (SJS)**.

SJS describes itself as a "non-commercial, multidisciplinary repository that provides journal-like services to entrust the evaluation, classification and communication of research to the unrestricted collective intelligence of the scientific community itself."



What is noteworthy about SJS is that it is not another open access journal, but a new-style publishing platform, and one that could be viewed as a direct challenge to the top-down power structure of academia, and to the oligarchic editorial boards of legacy journals.

It is also worth noting that Bon was not aware of the open access movement when he conceived SJS. His aim was to fix what he sees as serious problems in the current scholarly communication system – problems of quality, of transparency, and of effectiveness.

When he did find out about the open access movement Bon concluded that OA advocates have been trying to do things back to front, and as a result have played into the hands of publishers.

That is, in seeking to fix the access issue prior to fixing the structural flaws in the current publishing system the open access movement is overseeing the relocation of a broken model into a new environment.

By contrast, says Bon, SJS is focused on exploiting the new environment to reinvent scholarly communication. In the process, he says, the access issue is solved collaterally – since openness is a given in SJS' *modus operandi*.

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- About Richard Poynder
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- The State of Open Access
- The Basement Interviews
- Open Access Interviews
- Essays on Open Access
- Archive

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If you want to find out more about how SJS works, about Bon's philosophy and objectives, and where he thinks the OA movement has gone wrong, you can read a Q&A with him. This is available in a pdf file [here](#). [Usual health warning: it is 28 pages long].

For those who prefer paper, a print version of this interview is available [here](#).

Posted by Richard Poynder at [13:04](#)



4 comments:

Leonid Schneider said...



I appreciate that Michael sees his SJS as a kind of preprint server, which allows authors to submit their work for "proper" publication afterwards. As aside, a name change might be in order, to avoid such "proper" journals rejecting a SJS publication for being a journal article and not a preprint. There is currently no chance to win against the current system of impact factor and journal-Prestige-based publishing, I guess one just has to wait till traditional academic publishing (never mind if subscription or OA) has sufficiently discredited itself, before new approach to academic evaluation manifests.

To speed the process up, science needs transparency. Currently, anyone can dump anything on a preprint server, and with the good will towards it, it is taken seriously, hence the current scare about mobile phones causing cancer.

Any publication is potentially worthless if its original data is kept private. Data sharing should become standard, not an exception, so the wider community can build their own opinion, instead of blindly relying on honesty and competence of the paper's authors. Therefore I suggest SJS invites its authors per default to always make raw data available.

May 31, 2016 2:49 pm

Jeffrey Beall said...



I find it unbelievable that Bon "... was not aware of the open access movement when he conceived SJS." I suspect he's either dissembling or being disingenuous. His rhetoric, as well as his hackneyed disdain for the impact factor, closely matches that employed by OA advocates. His ideas are not new.

In the interview, Bon declares that "science can only be governed by the scientific community," yet both he and Mr. Poynder use the term "oligarchic editorial boards" pejoratively. The members of these boards are the scientific community.

The use of this term is offensive to the many conscientious scientists who volunteer on these editorial boards, scientists who guard against pseudo-science from entering the academic record and who make suggestions that correct errors in and improve the science of manuscripts submitted for publication in journals.

Having a chip on your shoulder is insufficient qualification for operating as a scholarly publisher. I have documented that pseudoscientists use the automatic acceptance in schemes such as Bon's to publish their papers that quality journals reject, and I wish the interviewer had asked how Bon plans to deal with the junk science that is surely to be submitted to his new service.

May 31, 2016 5:00 pm

Unknown said...



(1/2)

Dear Jeffrey,

Thank you for your interest in SJS and for the strong opinions you have shared!

I find it unbelievable that Bon "... was not aware of the open access movement when he conceived SJS." I suspect he's either dissembling or being disingenuous. His rhetoric, as well as his hackneyed disdain for

(A print version of this eBook is available [here](#)) Earlier this year I was invited to discuss with Georgia Institute of Technology libraria...



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Babu Gedela

***Update: On August 26th 2016, the US government (Federal Trade Commission) announced that it has charged OMICS with making false claims, ...

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the impact factor, closely matches that employed by OA advocates. His ideas are not new.

I want to fix scholarly communication and restore the positive collective spirit between scientists that was always implicit in the scientific mission. The main problem today is the use of the impact factor as a way of trying to evaluate articles. This has a terrible feedback effect on the way science is practised and produced. To me, the correct way to evaluate science is through open processes, and these trigger OA collaterally. In that sense I can definitely be viewed as an OA advocate.

In the interview, Bon declares that "science can only be governed by the scientific community," yet both he and Mr. Poynder use the term "oligarchic editorial boards" pejoratively.

Really?

The members of these boards are the scientific community.

No, they are members of the scientific community. They are the tiny subset that has power over the rest of the community. This creates an unhealthy and unproductive asymmetry.

The use of this term is offensive to the many conscientious scientists who volunteer on these editorial boards, scientists who guard against pseudo-science from entering the academic record and who make suggestions that correct errors in and improve the science of manuscripts submitted for publication in journals.

Please read the interview again, especially p.20. There is no criticism of editors, who may indeed be conscientious scientists. I blame academia itself, which has taken control of science away from the community and given it to journals through the use of the impact factor.

The power exerted by editors on science is a consequence of that poor choice. But this is not a choice that has been requested by the editors, but by their institutions, who have outsourced responsibility for evaluation to journals.

The problem is that the evaluation of science is such a complex task that it cannot be performed by any subset of the scientific community. By its nature the current evaluation system generates multiple problems, independently of the dedication and commitment of editors wanting to do a good job.

For instance, scientists start to behave as competitors, who have to jostle with one another to publish in the highest IF journals. Many editors have themselves complained that this "publish or perish" culture is terrible for science. But they cannot avoid it, since their mere existence in a world dominated by the IF creates this distortion, whether they like it or not.

Please review again the way the self-journal works. The assumption behind the self-journal is that every scientist is effectively an editor! My point (see [here](#)) is that I do not blame editors themselves but the impossible task that the academic system imposes on them.

May 31, 2016 8:24 pm

Unknown said...



(2/2)

Having a chip on your shoulder is insufficient qualification for operating as a scholarly publisher. I have documented that pseudoscientists use the >automatic acceptance in schemes such as Bon's to publish their papers that quality journals reject, and I wish the interviewer had asked how Bon plans to deal with the junk science that is surely to be submitted to his new service.

I think your vertical definition of scholarly publication is quite different from mine, and "I" am certainly not a publisher in your sense. There is no accept or reject decision in SJS, so your comparison needs some elaboration.

Please point me to any junk science you have seen on SJS. To me, the top-down certification logic that is implicit in the current obeisance to the IF is the reason why we see junk science. This has created a system

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While the term Open Access (OA) has its origins in the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), the concept and practice of OA has bee...

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2022 (2)
2020 (4)
2019 (7)
2018 (20)
2017 (18)
2016 (14)
December (2)
November (1)
October (1)
September (1)
July (2)
June (1)
May (1)
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April (1)
March (1)
February (2)
January (1)

2015 (18)
2014 (13)
2013 (32)
2012 (43)
2011 (22)
2010 (20)
2009 (22)
2008 (14)
2007 (9)
2006 (27)
2005 (31)
2004 (2)

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that is akin to putting "pyromaniac firemen" in charge of putting out fires. It is a system in which value is created by a confidential "yes" from two anonymous people in a short space of time. As such, there is a good statistical chance that any "junk" work can find a publisher willing to provide a stamp of approval. As a result, authors of junk are incentivised to try and get it published.

With SJS, value is recognised and rewarded when authors can openly convince the majority of the community that their work is valid and valuable, so there is absolutely nothing an author can gain by uploading junk, only shame and embarrassment, or at best indifference.

Consequently, a natural self-selection takes place, with authors only posting papers that they believe can withstand global scrutiny. So there is no junk, only a decision over time as to whether a paper is deemed to be correct or wrong.

May 31, 2016 8:25 pm

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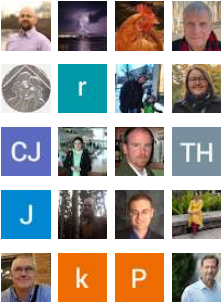
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